FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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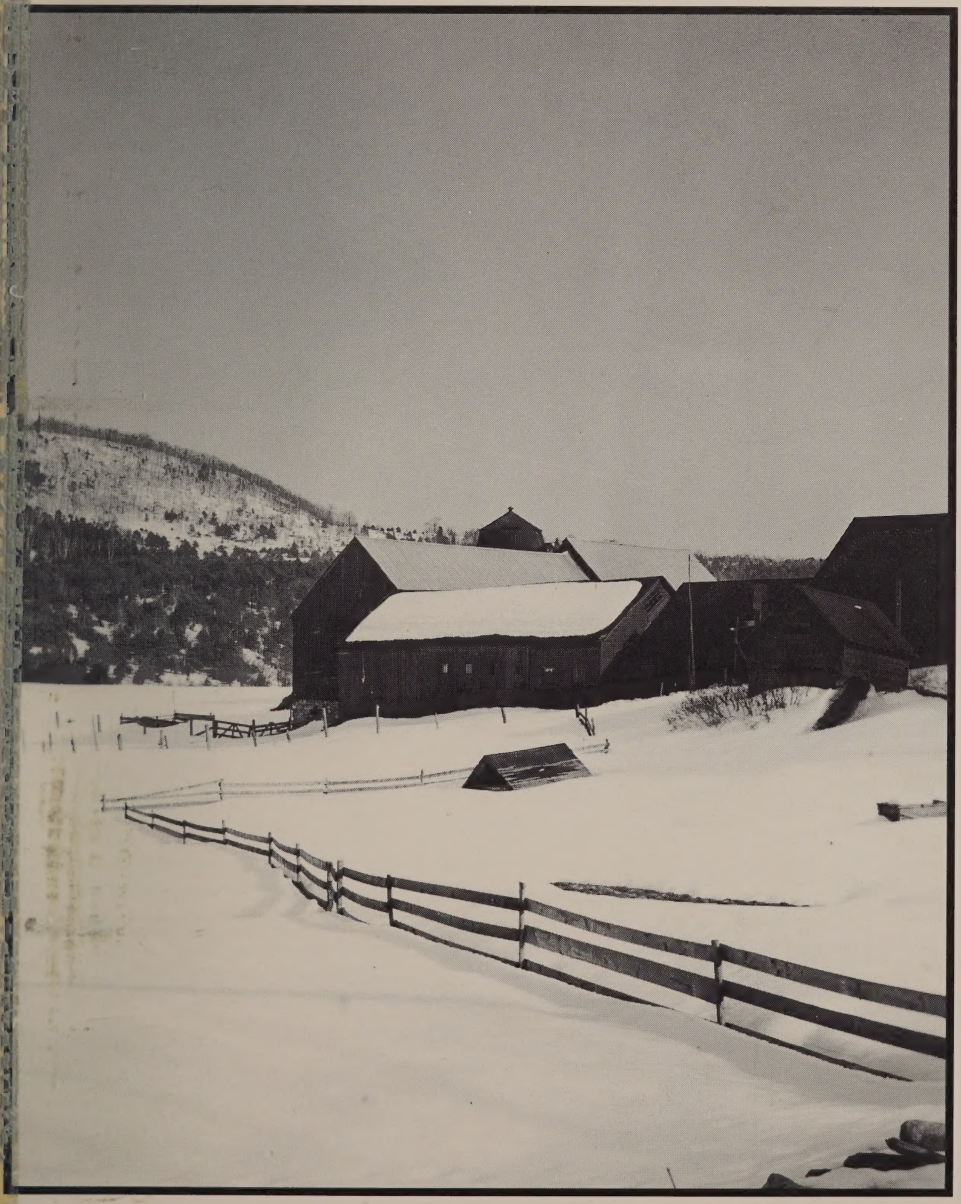

The purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

From the Articles of Incorporation, 1950.

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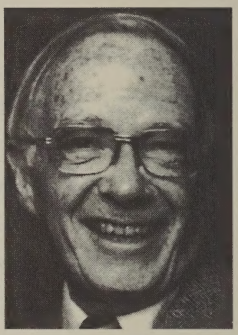
Cover photograph by Samuel Chamberlain: Snow: barn and zigzag fences.



The Gift of Prayer — to pray without ceasing — with words, with silence, with what Brother David Steindl-Rast calls a steady-state of prayerfulness — makes not only Christmas day but the whole holiday season a time of joy and peace.

In fact, a world at peace can come about only when each of us nurtures and acts from a peaceful heart, however obscured and burdened it is by fear and suffering. But perhaps in this season we can set aside fear:

Peace I leave you,
My peace I give unto you:
not as the world gives,
give I unto you.
Let not your heart be troubled,
neither let it be afraid.

John 14:27

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing dismay you.
All things pass.
God never changes.
Patience attains
all that it strives for.
He who has God
finds he lacks nothing.
God alone suffices.

St. Teresa of Avila

Peace is the world's most wished-for present:

Deep peace
of the running wave to you
Deep peace
of the quiet earth to you,
Deep peace
of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace
of the shining star to you.

Gaelic Blessing

May the blessing of God
rest upon you.
May his peace abide with you.
May his presence illuminate
your heart
Now and forevermore.

Sufi Blessing

What can we give in return? The poet Christina Rosetti writes in her beautiful poem/prayer, *Nativity:*

The prayers on these two pages are from The Gift of Prayer: A Treasury of Prayers from the World's Spiritual Traditions, *a Fellowship in Prayer book of over 400 classic and contemporary prayers. At your bookstore now.*

What shall I give him
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what can I give him —
Give my heart.

As we sit down to our festive holiday meals we can give thanks in gratitude for the gift of food. Buddhists and the Samburu people of Kenya say grace this way:

This food comes from
the Earth and Sky.
It is the gift
of the entire universe
And the fruit
of much hard work.
May we live in a way
that makes us worthy
to receive it.

Buddhist Prayer

Thank you very, very much;
my God, thank you.
Give me food today, food for
my sustenance every day.
Thank you very, very much.

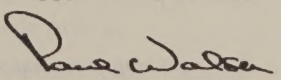
Samburu Prayer

At the end of the day, with hearts full of love and compassion, we might wish to offer up the following prayer by St. Augustine:

Watch, dear Lord,
With those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight,
and give your angels charge over those who sleep.
Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ,
rest your weary ones.
Bless your dying ones.
Soothe your suffering ones.
Pity your afflicted ones.
Shield your joyous ones.
And all for your love's sake,
Amen.

This Christmas, remember these Hindu words of wisdom: One of the best ways to worship God is simply to be happy.

May you and all beings enjoy a peaceful and happy holiday season!



Paul Walsh

Busy Doing Nothing, and Other Models of Prayer

ANCILLA ARMIJO

A Benedictine nun explores ways of knowing and loving God.

In our prayer life two different traditions are always interwoven. *The via negativa,* or apophatic tradition, emphasizes the radical difference between God and creatures. "God is best reached by negation, forgetting, and unknowing, in a darkness of mind without the support of concepts, images, and symbols." (D. Harvey Egan, SJ; *Christian Mysticism*)

The via affirmativa, or kataphatic tradition, looks for the similarity between God and creatures. "Because God can be found in all things, the affirmative way recommends the use of concepts, images, and symbols as a way of contemplating God."

Three models of prayer illustrate the complementarity of these two traditions:

(1) *The Prayer of Waiting:* the necessity of "wasting time" in coming to know and be known, which eventually results in spontaneous prayer encompassing the whole of our day, becoming an abiding awareness of God's continual presence.

(2) *The Prayer of Brokenness:* learning to let go of the false idols and illusions we have created of God, life, others; a dying to self that calls forth conversion and transformation.

(3) *The Prayer of Partial Vision:* mystical prayer of the cloud, of knowing through not knowing.

The Prayer of Waiting.

For prayer to become a spontaneous response in our life, we must first take the risk of being present and at home in the heart. We must set

A member of the community at the Abbey of St. Walburga in Boulder, Colorado, Sister Ancilla Armijo has engaged in a wide variety of activities ranging from writing, painting, and weaving tapestries to tending sheep on the abbey fields.

aside time and space where this encounter with the sacred reality can blossom forth in a growing, loving, all-embracing relationship. We must learn to "waste time" with God.

The best expression I have come across of this need to waste time in order to get to know comes from Antoine de Saint Exupery's book, *The Little Prince.* The little prince, wandering the earth in search of friends, meets a fox who asks to be tamed. The little prince asks, "What does that mean - 'tame'?" "To establish ties," the fox answers.

> If you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine in my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different. . . Yours will call me like music, out of my burrow. You must be very patient. First you will sit down at a little distance from me. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day.

If we want to establish ties with God, we must take the risk of being tamed, of becoming vulnerable. And we must be faithful to this time of being together. The fox counsels the little prince to come back each day at the same time.

> If, for example, you come at four o'clock, then at three o'clock I shall begin to be happy. I shall feel happier and happier as the hour advances. But if you come just at any time, I shall never know at what hour my heart is to be ready to greet you. . . One must observe the proper rites.

From this growing awareness of God, spontaneous prayer will rise from our hearts like a spring of living water, refreshing, giving life and meaning.

As we come to know and to love God, we begin to discover the reflections of his presence in all the different details and aspects of our daily lives. He will appear to us in what we may have considered useless, or even in what we have never considered at all, where we least expected to find him. As the fox says to the little prince,

> You see the grain fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the color of gold. Think how

> wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat.

From this growing awareness of God, spontaneous prayer will rise from our hearts like a spring of living water, refreshing, giving life and meaning. Of its own accord Our hearts will turn to conversation with God, as soon as we find ourselves available. This form of prayer is deeply rooted in our Jewish heritage; the perfect example of this is Tevye in *The Fiddler on the Roof.* With simplicity and honesty he talks with his God, hiding nothing from Him.

Scripture is, of course, full of this kind of prayer, which arises not purely out of the intellect but out of life itself, from the heart. For example, in the Book of Wisdom, the Divine is personified in the character of Wisdom, yearned for by the faithful worshipper. The author assures us that our desire will be fulfilled, if it is sincere.

> [Wisdom] is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of men's desire; he who watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, for he shall find her sitting by his gate. For

> taking thought of her is the perfection of prudence, and he who for her sake keeps vigil shall quickly be free of care. (Wisdom 6:12-15).

The prayer of waiting requires that we make time to be with God, that we are always open and honest with Him, and that we remain faithful to our prayer.

The Prayer of Brokenness.

The prayer of brokenness is the spirituality of the grain: "Unless the wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest" (John 12:24). This form of prayer is a deep inner struggle of learning to let go, of being stripped of our false idols, of the illusions we hold of God, ourselves, others and life in general. The catalyst for this conversion and transformation is God's intervention in our lives, Love acting to bring about a greater good, a richer harvest. Often this intervention is not immediately perceived as grace, moving us toward needed conversion and new vision. Rather, our initial response is resistance. We try to escape from this purification. In this process we experience the five stages of dying: 1) a time of denial, the "No, it can't be me" syndrome; 2) rage and anger; 3) bargaining with God; 4) depression; 5) and a coming to acceptance through submission.

We find this model of prayer in the image of Jacob wrestling with the angel (Gen. 32:23-32). Indeed, this form of prayer is a struggle to accept God's will and submit to it. The prophet Jeremiah best exemplifies this stance.

Jeremiah was a man in conflict, undergoing a deep interior crisis, struggling and resisting God's call, and therefore God's will for him. He saw it as bringing him only derision and reproach. He was a man whose life was full of contradiction, of light and darkness, of being suspended between divine ecstasy, overpowering in its joy, and death-wish depression. With him we often find ourselves crying out in prayer: "You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed. . . The Word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day. I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. but then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it" (Jer. 20:7-9). Here we find denial, rage, anger and depression:

> Cursed be the day on which I was born! May the day my mother gave me birth never be blessed!. . . Cursed be the man who brought the news . . . because he did not dispatch me in the womb! Then my mother would have been my grave, her womb confining me forever. Why did I come forth from the womb, to see sorrow and pain, to end my days in shame? (Jer. 20:14-15, 17-18).

God brings us full-circle; we have to make a choice. We are forced, as it were, to make a choice. Gradually the darkness and dampness of being buried in the ground brings about the softening of the hard shell of our resistance, and the tender shoot of new life pushes through the hard earth, sprouting forth in hope. We begin to find light and growth in submission to the mystery of his grace, to feel ourselves called by his name: "When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart, because I bore your name!" (Jer. 15:16).

But this kenosis, this emptying and dying to self, cannot be undergone for its own sake. It must, in turn, be transformed, poured out in service. We are disciples of the water and the towel, washing each other's feet, serving at the table of one another's need. Then is this form of prayer moved from the realm of the "formal" to the sphere of lived experience. Our life is taken up in the act of praying, and itself becomes prayer.

The Prayer of Partial Vision.

All forms of prayer involve partial vision, for we cannot know God in his essence. "Now we see only reflections in a mirror, mere riddles, but then we shall be seeing face to face. Now, I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall know just as fully as I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). In this life we are enveloped in the thick cloud, where we perceive his presence and even at times may hear his voice, but where we cannot see his face.

> Our life of prayer must encompass both the positive and the negative, it must be holistic, taking the light and shadow side and making them one in God.

The paradox of this form of prayer is that we must arrive at stillness in saying "yes" in the darkness, in the cloud of knowing through not

Patti Wood Whitely

knowing. "The final attainment of man's knowledge of God consists in knowing that we do not know him, in so far as we realize that he transcends everything that we understand concerning him." (Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God*). As the psalmist writes, God has "made darkness the cloak about him; dark, misty rain-clouds his wrap" (Ps. 18:12). As we enter this cloud of mystery we embrace the knowledge of God's unfathomableness in silence, waiting and openness: "Cultivate stillness and train yourselves for contemplation. The monk who does this stands unimpeded in the presence of God, without anxiety, holding himself back; for such a man spends his life with God." (Norman Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*). We hide ourselves, through the darkness of faith, in God, who is Mystery.

In the "Prayer of Waiting" the *via affirmativa* or kataphatic tradition predominates. The vision of the prayer tends to be positive and joyful, and reflections of God's presence are easily perceived. In the "Prayer of Brokenness" the *via negativa* or apophatic tradition is central in its role of bringing about the needed transformation and conversion. But it is in the "Prayer of Partial Vision" that what seems negative turns out to be the most positive! Paradox transcends human terms and brings about a well-rounded spirituality of prayer. Our life of prayer must encompass both the positive and the negative, it must be holistic, taking the light and shadow side and making them one in God.

With Mary, Pondering

MARGARET G. PAYNE

A Lutheran minister reflects on the little-known life of the mother of Jesus and finds wisdom for daily living — for all of us.

> But Mary kept all these things,
> pondering them in her heart.
>
> LUKE 2:19

I love the word ponder because it moves through my mind like a mantra, and pondering is one of my favorite things to do. I guess I always pondered because I remember elementary school teachers who accused me of day-dreaming. In high school I escaped the boredom of the work and tension of the classroom by rambling around in a favorite thought or emotion. But by the time I got to college I felt that I needed self-discipline, and allowed myself only "ponder-breaks" during study time. I would take ten minutes every hour to cut loose from calculus or French and wander. I strolled through mental alleyways and roved all over, though in those days I invariably ended up in the neighborhood of romance.

I did not know then that I was cultivating one of the most important skills of my life. Once a teacher told me that I was lazy and never paid attention to the important things that she was trying to teach me, and so for a long time I felt guilty. But now I know that I was deficient only in her small expectations. At another level I was warming up for the kind of mystical journeying that leads a human spirit to ledges of insight and occasionally to mountaintops of revelation. The pondering self is an opening for God to come into our thoughts and hearts. Prayer is likely to have an agenda, thinking bogs down in the rational, and theologizing uses words that are too big for comfort. But pondering is an easy drift of the spirit that gives God plenty of options to join us here or there, and nudge us toward divine will and purpose.

An ordained Lutheran pastor who graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, Margaret Payne is assistant to the bishop in the New Jersey Synod. She served as a parish pastor for eight years.

At the risk of being called sexist, I think that pondering is a particularly feminine thing to do. While many women ponder, many men are more likely to think, plan, analyze, evaluate, propose, consider, deliberate, surmise, and determine. Now I must say that some of my best male friends ponder. But they are the ones who also exhibit some strikingly feminine qualities such as gentleness, vulnerability, and a passion for peace-making and connection. So maybe the ability to ponder breeds in the feminine part of the human being and thus is more natural for women to find and develop.

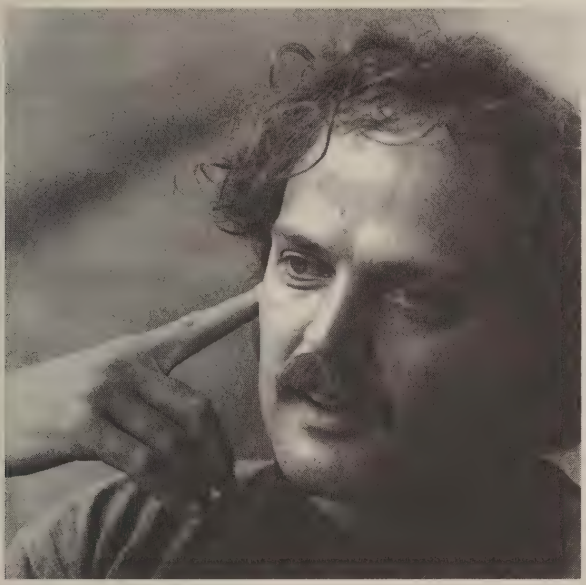
Mary is the person in the Bible who teaches us to ponder, and we learn from her that pondering is a good way to unlock the mystery of God's will, and puzzle out how to submit to it.

Mary is an important part of the Christmas story, not only because she has the female lead in the drama of the Word become flesh, but also because of what she is as a person of faith. In the Roman Catholic tradition, there are many Marian festivals that celebrate her life and unique relationship to Christ, but Protestants have always been reluctant to give her time or liturgical energy. I suppose we fear that people will be tempted to worship her instead of Christ, or that they will put too much emphasis on her role in salvation. But Mary is our best biblical model of willing obedience: she never came up with excuses or pleaded extenuating circumstances, and we learn from her the joy of submission to the will of God.

When I stop pondering, a feeing of emptiness comes into my time, as frightening as a deep, dry well.

Submissiveness is a misunderstood virtue these days, and it is often scorned by men and claimed too emphatically by women. Its meaning stalls in the starting-gate, and it is confused with passivity or subjection to the will of another human being. Or people imagine that they will lose their own identities or miss out on good times if they are too submissive, and so they try to negotiate a compromise between God's will and their own.

What is even worse for them is that submissiveness cannot be accomplished in one satisfying swoop, like a day at a soup kitchen or a sermon finally written and typed. Submission to the will of God is a life-long discipline that is rooted and grows in humility, prayer, lis-



Tom Dunham

tening, and pondering, as well as an agreement to be close kin to the foolish, unseen, and disenfranchised. It is usually misinterpreted as weakness by a world that looks suspiciously on any transfer of power from the self, but Mary teaches that when submission to God is let loose to race with other styles of living, it pulls easily ahead into the victory of joy and justice. It provides life at a satisfying gallop, fast and fulfilling, characterized by contentment and high-spirited courage, and it is an unmistakable sign of great faith.

Turning Points

I can imagine that Mary needed plenty of "ponder-breaks" to comprehend what it meant to be the mother of the Messiah. Before the visit from Gabriel, her existence was no doubt normal and predictable — a small home on a dusty street, repetitious daily chores, the sun rising and setting every day on a simple life. She lived the quiet life of a humble Jewish girl, but suddenly that whole time became a prelude for the moment when God reached into history by reaching into her unused womb. For her, it was as much a death as a beginning: the end of her present existence as well as the birth of her eternal and myste-

rious identity as the woman who bore Christ. It is easy to lose sight of how radically her life was changed, because she never whines about the difficulties and we move quickly into the story of Christ. But when Mary was chosen, she was both born again and pierced forever, and right from the beginning she knew in her own heart what this child would teach the world about reversals.

When Mary was visited by Gabriel, her first instinct was to "consider in her mind what sort of greeting this might be." She hit the ground pondering. She was no fool, and knew that an angel sent by God needed a more thorough kind of attention than feeble rationalization or spineless quaking. Although she was troubled, she agreed to embrace God's plan; and at this utterly unique turning point in the history of the world is Mary, who said: "Let it be." She took into herself the word of the angel, as she took the Word of God, so that she could ponder it and grow it into a mature and eloquent form.

After her interview with Gabriel, Mary hurried to a relationship of human love and understanding to find support and to share the news. Although pondering is mostly a private thing to do, women know that sharing life helps to make sense of it; it divides the burden and creates community based not on power, but on affection and interwoven stories. Elizabeth had a story to tell and an unexpected pregnancy too, and there was a lot to talk about. It was with Elizabeth that Mary found the words to express an understanding of God's purpose, and her haunting Magnificat is not only an outburst of joy, but a clear statement that justice is always part of God's plan. After a song to marvel at her favor with God and her vision of God's will for the world, she turned then toward the new life growing within her.

Astonishment must have lined all the days they spent together, and it was during the three months with Elizabeth that Mary was sustained and prepared for the years to come. We know nothing about the details of this time; after the early conversations there is silence. But the quiet, that comes after assent, signals courage, and as far as we know, Mary lived a quiet courage for the rest of her life.

Turning points seem to be the times when people need to do the most pondering. Although Mary's turning point seems so obvious, maybe it was just as invisible as most of ours, as imperceptible as the moment when lengthening nights turn into lengthening days and the year shifts toward summer. Sometimes we are that unaware of turning points and messages from God, buried as they are under the cold

and dark, under the normal happenings of normal days, hidden in places where we would never guess to look for them. But when we take more time to ponder, as Mary did, we discover the turns and direction that God wants us to find.

Holding the Pieces Together

There is more to Mary's pondering than casual contemplation. The Greek word that most scholars translate as "ponder" has a complex meaning and gives a fuller explanation of Mary's way of knowing God. It means, literally, "to throw or put together." So the Greek tells us that Mary took all of the many parts of her life — her thoughts, her observations, her visions, and her knowledge of being chosen as mother of the Christ, and constantly brought them together in her heart to help her understand what was happening, and what it meant. She pulled them into her pondering self, and held them together until they began to speak to one another, and speak to her, and take shape as the body of God's will for her life. It takes a lot of energy to ponder that intentionally, and it takes a lifetime.

Peter G. Haskell

Every now and then I lose sight of the model of Mary and slip into a busyness that leaves no time for pondering. If things are going well and I am accomplishing many tasks, I often think that I shouldn't ponder so much. After all, it was while pondering that I hit the side of the garage with the car, burned grilled cheese sandwiches beyond counting, and earned my reputation as a woman likely to be oblivious to children in distress. Pondering separates me from the concrete world.

But when I stop pondering, a feeling of emptiness comes into my time, as frightening as a deep, dry well. All of those accomplishments make a wall that rises up between me and God, and there are no openings to make connections or feel the nudges that come my way. If I try to fix the problem by pondering on the run, it's like giving my husband a kiss on the run — it holds me for a while, but I miss the lingering, and soon the relationship begins to suffer. Human intimacy needs regular attention to flourish, and intimacy with God needs pondering.

When we see Mary's humanity clearly, we begin to learn. There are only a few clues from Scripture, but they are clear enough to suggest the power of her faith. It is not hard to understand that it was obedience that brought deep joy to her life, or to realize that pondering was the tool for getting through the tough times and discerning God's will. It is easy to see that claiming Mary as a model is a good thing to do. The hard part is remembering to remember her throughout the year, and finding ways to keep close to her insights about life in relationship to God. It requires both discipline and letting go, but when we do that, there is an amazing gift: Mary teaches us how to contain Christ.

Just a Little About the Horizontal Jesus

ALVIN JOAQUIN FIGUEROA

Memories of childhood Christmas holidays in Puerto Rico help this writer to find Jesus here on earth.

For some reason, this past Christmas I was more homesick than ever. I really don't know why, but it seems that the older I get, the more I like reminiscing about things I have left behind; my old friends, my family, and my traditions — especially during the holidays.

Back home in Puerto Rico, Christmas holidays start immediately after Thanksgiving and end eight days after Epiphany. But in reality they could extend until February 2, when we burn our Christmas trees in honor of *la Candelaria* (or the Virgin of Fire, if you want). And that's when all the partying and singing stop.

In Puerto Rico we have a custom called *parrandas*. At *parranda* a group of friends get together to sing Christmas songs; songs with a Caribbean beat, not related at all to the Christmas carols you know in the English speaking world. These *parrandas* take place late at night and they last until early morning. We "assault" several homes, singing in the street out loud until the owners of those houses open the doors. Then we occupy the premises, drink, eat, dance and have a great time. The dwellers of the last house *have* to offer us breakfast. . .and then we leave until the next night. This could sound a little daring to the American mind, but a *parranda* is a celebration of community.

But maybe the most important celebration we have during Christmas time is Epiphany, or as we call it: Three King's Day. In reality the "kings" were not kings, but pagan astrologers who came to visit Baby Jesus in the manger after following a star that led their way. Puerto Rican culture, which inherited this tradition from old Spain, con-

The author of a number of books and articles, Alvin Figueroa did his doctorate in Spanish American Literature and teaches at Trenton State College in New Jersey. He writes on gay/lesbian literature, feminist literature and Liberation Theology, among other topics.

A Cemetery in

Tom Dunham

Oaxaca, Mexico

sidered this visit somewhat more important than the actual birth of Jesus.

Picture it! It's the mid-sixties and a skinny kid from the industrial section of greater San Juan (Hato Rey) is looking for grass on January the fifth. Not pot; real grass! Why does he need this grass? He needs it in order to put it inside a shoebox along with water so the Three Wise Mens' camels have something to eat and drink before departing again to leave presents for the other kids in the neighborhood. He knows the first thing in the morning he's going to look under his bed, where the grass and the water were substituted by the presents that Melchior, Casper and Balthazar left for him.

Of course, I was that kid and back then I didn't try to figure out why these three guys from the Orient could land, camels and all, in a small island in the middle of the Caribbean sea. And the terrible moment I was told one December 24th that Santa Claus did not exist, I said: "But the Three Kings do, right?" And the thing is that these three guys are our myth; so we choose to believe in them.

A myth is a story that conveys a message and has a poetic meaning; a symbolic truth. The Bible is full of them. The story of the universal flood, for example, is a myth that appears in — among other mythologies — the ancient Greek tradition. The fable of the tempting snake in Eden is another; the story of a savior who is born from a virgin mother is a common mythical place in ancient religions.

Generations of Christians have fought and even killed to defend the veracity of those myths, without realizing that what matters is not their veracity, but the symbolic truth they want to convey. And the truth is that we human beings cannot get by without these "truth-lies" called myths. We mythify our family, our lovers, our closest friends, our countries. We create a whole narrative of survival; our own personal psychological cosmologies.

But the problem with myths is that we rely too much upon them and for centuries we have been more preoccupied with the fantastic and supernatural aspects of our religion (the literary part), than with its human aspect. That's where the dialectics between a horizontal and a vertical theology have to be taken into consideration in any discussion of our belief system.

The poetry of the Gospel moves me, but what moves me more is the Jesus that seems less mythical; the one made out of flesh and blood. Ironically, this is the myth I prefer to believe in. Saint Theresa of Avila wrote a wonderful poem in which she tells Jesus that it is not "the

Heaven you have promised me that moves me, but your pain and sorrow. . ." So here we have a woman who identifies with Christ's ordeal and whose love is the only thing that really matters, because, according to the Spanish saint, "Even if there's no heaven or hell, I would love you." In her human words lies her sanctity, and precisely because of her humanity. She does not expect a reward; love itself is sufficient.

I have arrived at a point in my life where I no longer make problems out of the mysteries of our religion. As far as I am concerned there aren't many problems, and I truly believe that our divinity comes from our own humanity. And it works like this: we are divine because Jesus was human. If he was or was not the son of God or if the Bible is or is not the true word of God (which I doubt in many instances), it makes no difference to me anymore.

For me, the greatness of Christianity has to do with the fact that Jesus was a historical person, not a distant god on Olympus who was playing with our heads.

I recently saw a movie called *Little Buddha*. In this movie, a tiny kid in Seattle is believed to be the reincarnation of an important lama. When the boy asks one of his mentors if Siddhartha was a god, he answers: "No, he was human"; to which the boy replies: "Like Jesus."

During Good Friday, the Gypsies of Seville build ladders and place them at the foot of the many crucifixes depicting Christ's agony. Why? They expect Jesus to step down and be with them.

Was Jesus killed so the Old Testament could be fulfilled or was he killed because his voice was a threat to the Roman political power? Mythology would emphasize the former; history would emphasize the latter. The truth is that Jesus, like all of us, formed part of a society, believed in his own myths, belonged to a social class, and had friends as well as enemies. But we have been, for centuries, communicating with Christ in a vertical way. We look up to the sky when we talk with him, because we have this mythical notion that Heaven is beyond the clouds. We build cathedrals with huge spires and cupolas that point out to the sky. We place more importance in the poetic myths we have created about the afterlife and go crazy with angelmania and the occult. In other words, we keep on trying to explain God outside of rationality, when in fact Jesus is here.

During Good Friday, the Gypsies of Seville build ladders and place

them at the foot of the many crucifixes depicting Christ's agony. Why? They expect Jesus to step down and be with them. Now, that's a beautiful myth. Beautiful because the gypsies don't want to waste their time looking up to a god they cannot communicate with. It is as though they were saying, "Be with us and don't go." This human plea comes from a group that celebrates Holy Week with great devotion, but they have replaced a vertical theology with a horizontal one.

And it is precisely this symbolic shift from the Heavens to the Earth that moves us to believe, but in our own human terms. The idea of Santa Claus flying around with reindeer is ridiculous, but kids believe, because they want to believe. After all, American kids want that nice Nordic guy with an eating disorder to be here with them and not be a stranger. It is their myth and it gives them happiness and hope.

For me, the idea of three Arab guys with camels visiting kids in Latin America is also ludicrous, but the beauty of it all lies in the fact that Melchior, Casper and Balthazar are seeing Jesus in every one of those kids. When I was a kid, I was Jesus every January 6th. The fact is that we are all Jesus and it's time for us to create human-centered rituals and mythologies that show us the nature of our divinity here on earth, without having to look for it in the clouds.

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Sacred Diminishments

AVIS CROWE

The pain of watching a loved one undergo physical, psychological, and spiritual loss is relieved by a moment of deep joy.

I was almost 40 when I saw love for the first time. I mean really SAW it. It was during a visit to my dad in a South Florida nursing home. My mother, no longer able to take care of him at home, had joined the millions of women forced by circumstance to entrust the care of their husbands to strangers. Having lived together for better or worse for nearly 50 years, they were torn asunder by my father's illness. Time together was dictated by clocks and schedules and mom's energy and stamina. When they could be together, they were never really alone. He shared a room, and in the corridors and lounge areas, staff and other residents and visitors were a constant presence. Privacy, sacred to my father, would never be his again. But it probably didn't matter anymore.

The few miles between mom's apartment and dad's new "home" wasn't the only distance that separated them. A combination of degenerative illnesses had begun to rob my father of his rational mind. Arterial sclerosis and Parkinson's disease were the partners in this theft, and there was no way to recapture or replace what was gone. The words on his chart were "cerebral atrophy"; cold, medical terms that couldn't begin to convey the transformation of an intelligent, strong, independent person into a trembling, uncertain, semi-coherent old man. Neither did they give a hint of the occasional hilarity of sentences he'd utter out of the blue that had no outward meaning. Like, "Let's blacken our fingernails and set forth, sacred to the water gods", or asked if he wanted to look at the paper, "Maybe look at the headlines and eat a coconut." "Where on earth did that come from?" I wondered when I heard his odd pronouncements.

Sometimes it was fairly obvious what was going on in his head, as when he said, "Charles (his own name) has gone down to the corner

A contemplative and very active freelance writer, Avis Crowe is a regular contributor to Fellowship in Prayer. *Her mother recently celebrated her 90th birthday.*

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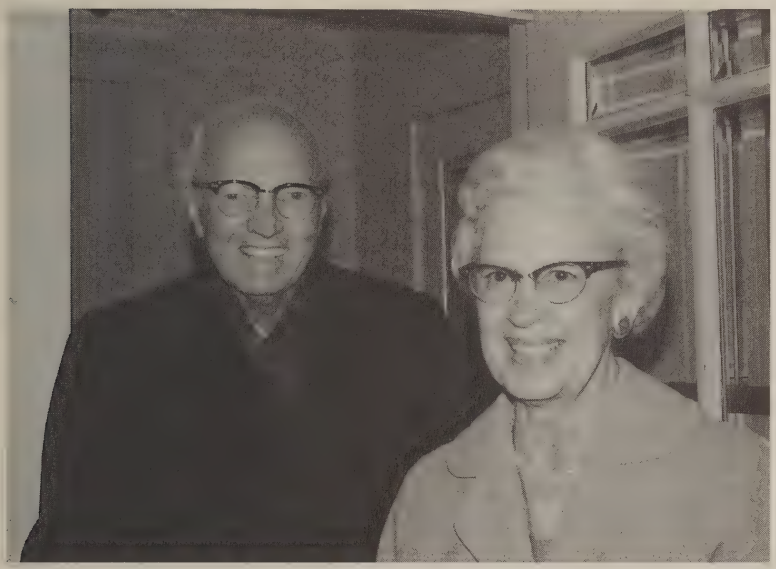

Avis Crowe's parents in 1974

to pick up oddments for the memorial service." These bits of disconnected thoughts, memories, dreams perhaps, came in between more coherent statements that clearly showed he remained present to some degree of reality. In spite of the deep sadness we felt, Dad's unexpected and sometimes bizarre comments provided some comic relief, and mother and I were drawn together in laughter.

The "unhooking" from rational thought also led my father to an uncharacteristic immodesty, throwing off his covers with abandon, and to sudden outbursts of profanity and anger. He'd yell out, "Damn it...listen to me!" When a nurse would come, she might hear him burst out, "Where the hell have YOU been?" He had enough awareness to call the nurse back later to apologize, saying he'd "made a jackass of myself." Hearing these angry words from my father astounded me. A minister all his life, conservative and proper to the core, this was a man of polite discourse and carefully controlled emotions. He had always loomed larger than life for me . . . self-contained, somewhat rigid. He rarely allowed anyone a glimpse behind the persona of Reverend. Now I was seeing him without the mask. After the initial shock at such

unfamiliar behavior, I was enchanted. He would never know — nor would he have understood if he had known, that his outbursts and lack of concern about what others thought were a real gift to me. The defenses he had so carefully constructed over a lifespan had come tumbling down. I saw for the first time a life-size and vulnerable man; and I found him endearing and lovable. How I wished he could have let down the barriers long ago.

All of this was going through my head and heart as I sat in a chair in my father's room, watching. In the other bed a man whose name I never knew lay quietly; his wife sat by his side, holding his hand. Dad, too, was resting comfortably; I watched mom reach for a tube of lotion from the bedside table, squeeze a bit into her hands, and begin to massage his feet. I watched as she tenderly rubbed the soothing lotion into dad's heel, instep, arch and toes. I watched as her hands meandered a bit higher to massage his ankle and calf. No words were spoken. Mother's total attention was on this man with whom she had shared nearly half a century. I watched as Dad reached up and stroked mom's cheek and said, quietly, "You're wonderful."

I saw for the first time a life-size and vulnerable man; and I found him endearing and lovable. How I wish he could have let down the barriers long ago.

That's when I saw it. The sterile, unadorned room was permeated with the love of these two women caring for their men. I saw love made visible, embodied. . .the Word become flesh. I saw love of such clarity and beauty that it was almost too much to bear. It was a moment of grace; brief, incandescent, holy. I shall carry it with me always.

Hospital Threat

ANITA WHEATCROFT

During a near-death experience, this poet's spirit was vibrantly alive, trusting, hoping, and creating.

It was an unforgettable dream. It came after I had been transferred by ambulance from our small suburban hospital to a cardiac care unit in a Houston hospital.

Any cardiac care unit is a crisis center and, therefore, not reassuring in itself. Yet in spite of being attached to a heart monitor on the left, and an I.V. on the right, in clinical surrounding, I felt relieved to be there. My doctors were excellent, the nurses were skilled and compassionate. I knew I was in one of the best medical centers in the country.

Ironically, however, as I was feeling better, with less chest pain and fatigue, those around me communicated mounting anxiety. Doctors and nurses weren't transmitting this by their medical comments, nor could I read it from the monitor above my bed or the strange markings that poured out on the ticker tape from the EKG tests I was given. It was in the anxious face of my beloved, Dick, and in the faces of nurses and aides. Despite my efforts to stay hopeful and optimistic, as several days passed, I began to realize things were looking bad. So I prayed even harder for a trustful spirit, and at night I consciously enumerated and gave thanks for each day's mercies.

This particular evening, time went by slowly after Dick left. While the curtain separating my cubicle from the others was open, my thoughts could move about with doctors and nurses in the daytime environment of hope. Now, however, with lights dimmed and staff completing their evening tasks with lowered voices, the outside world retreated. My nurse came to the bed to check vital signs and settle me in for the night. She adjusted electrodes on my chest and left side, and attached them to the monitor panel above my bed. They were con-

Anita Wheatcroft, who resides in Texas, is a regular contributor to Fellowship in Prayer *and to a number of religious magazines. She has published four church school curricula and is currently working in the area of adult spirituality and the spiritual lives of children. The incident she describes took place fifteen years ago. Today she lives a full, active life.*

nected by hard rubber tubes that coiled around and under me, which made finding a comfortable position for sleep a challenge. She worked skillfully, then said goodnight, and pulled closed the curtain across the front of the bed. Overhead lights were turned out. Silence descended on the unit, and I was alone.

Solitude for me has seldom been negative and is not at all the same as loneliness. Usually I can count on being companioned by my active imagination and, more helpfully, by the blessed dialogue of prayer. That night, the greatest blessing was that my held-back tears could flow at last without fear of worrying anyone needlessly. Soon I was wept out and felt exhausted. Then, somewhere, wading in that land between sleep and waking, between water and dry land, I came upon my strange and memorable dream.

I began to realize things were looking bad. So I prayed even harder for a trustful spirit . . .

I dreamt of a pool in the woods. The clear blue-green water was darker because of the shade of trees. Someone was tossing small stones into the pool. I realized I was one of those stones, and felt myself fall into the water. Yet, as in many dreams, I was also an onlooker.

As my pebble hit the water, ripples appeared in concentric circles, growing larger till they reached almost to the shore. Then they disappeared, growing smaller as I watched. Now they were gone, leaving the surface of the pond as smooth as though nothing had been tossed into it. I stood there numb and empty. A sudden bird song rose, then died away. Its echo was the echo of my own sadness, for everything was over.

Again there came a heaviness in my chest which I'd felt for a few days. It was hard to swallow. I knew somehow that this was not physical discomfort alone, but a new, vast emptiness. I could not seem to give it an identity. What had me in its spell?

Then I understood. *Meaninglessness.* That was the name of the enemy I was seeing and experiencing in my life. Fully awake now, I lay very still, not struggling to deny or to escape my dream, which I had to accept as mine.

It seemed God guided me to listen to this dream and let it speak to me. Along with other deep spiritual experiences during my life, I believed it was sent for a reason — to show me something.

Behind the nightmare mood of the dream were symbols of meaninglessness and futility. It was a relief to come face-to-face with the enemy and know its name. What is life without meaning? Perhaps each life, including my own, was like a small stone tossed into the pond. Memories and influences ripple around it for a while, making smaller or larger circles, then disappear. The surface of the water is clear and still, as it was before, as if that pebble had never been tossed into it. Perhaps soon it would be as if I'd never lived at all. Failures, joys, struggles, and unrealized visions were gone, swallowed by the water. Perhaps this was the way it had always been, for everyone.

Such moods had come unexpectedly at other times and could be quickly overcome. Tonight it was different. Clearly, dispassionately, I saw my own life as one of the pebbles tossed into the pool. I forced myself to realize this might happen. I knew I might not live through this serious illness, that I might not even live till morning. So much left undone — so little accomplished.

"But that is always true," an inner voice protested. Rallying, another voice cried out, "What about me? — What about hope?"

Within me this strange dialogue went on, a tug-of-war between the forces of futility and despair and forces of renewal and hopeful faith. Beyond the struggle was a peace settling over me, releasing me from

Brooks Walsh/Jackie Beckett

the arguments and struggles of the will to be positive, to affirm life by my own efforts. Then the face of Christ came into focus, and I prayed with all my strength, "Oh God in Christ, please come! Conclude my dream. Show me just enough to go on, to live by."

Even as I prayed, I sensed a strong assurance and gave thanks. The "enemy" had visited me earlier during these weeks in the hospital. It had come in the form of fear or pain, and sometimes both. For fear, I'd been given courage; for pain, protection, and a spiritual anesthetic that is His gift. Now, here the enemy was again, with a new mask and a new identity. This time its name was *meaningless.* More dreadful than the prospect of severely limited life or even death itself was the despair of meaninglessness.

My urgent prayer was answered that night by the gift of sleep. Then, somewhere between sleeping and reawakening, I had a second dream. In loving mercy, God did not leave me floundering back and forth between despair and hope, nor wait until later for another dream to answer my need. *The answer came to me that very night.*

My second dream was this: I was standing in a beautiful clearing in the woods near the same pool, and the only sounds were the songs of birds, as it had been before. Suddenly, several young children appeared, laughing, splashing, and wading in the water. Picture-book children. Little girls pulled off long stockings; then, holding up their skirts, they waded into the water. Freckle-faced boys rolled up their jeans so they could wade out into the middle where the water was cool and deep. I was watching them, but I was invisible, and their happy remarks were not addressed to me.

It seemed they had been walking a long time and were delighted to find, at last, a pool with a smooth ground bed to wade in — no slime or tangle of water lilies, no poisonous snakes or sharp rocks to cut their feet. "At least it makes a difference how we live, if it is smoother for those who come after us." I told myself, interpreting the symbol. Then the children disappeared, and the pool was still again, and only bird calls filled the air.

Meaninglessness. That was the name of the enemy I was seeing and experiencing in my life.

Next, I saw a man, tall, strong and bearded with smiling eyes. He was dressed like a woodsman in heavy shoes, and was unhurried, en-

joying the peace and beauty around him, whistling softly. I watched him, apparently as invisible to him as I had been to the children.

He sat down on the bank of the pool, rolled up his sleeves, and dipped his hand into the water. The children gathered round him. Slowly, but deliberately, he took from the water a pebble, polished it with a red bandanna handkerchief, and laid it on the grass. Then he repeated the process, laying the pebbles carefully on the grass where they shone in the sun.

A friend of mine collects stones and rocks and has a tumbler in which he shines them. One summer, I gave him a few we had found on vacation. They'd been selected at random for their shape or bit of color or feel, and I wanted him to polish them so my son could add them to his collection. After the long tumbling process, my few gray stones were turned into little jewels. In the hands of the man in my dream, those pebbles were transformed like that. Each one was beautiful, perfect in itself, and yet no two were alike. Sunlight filtered through dark trees and suddenly, the silence of the woods was alive with the song of many birds.

Each life, I realized, is valuable, but only after it has been in the hands of God, who takes the little, dusty, misshapen pebbles of our days and transforms them into jewels.

It was still night when I awoke, but for me a dawn had come — new life, a victory over meaninglessness and death.

Each life, I realized, is valuable, but only after it has been in the hands of God, who takes the little, dusty, misshapen pebbles of our days and transforms them into jewels. The joy that filled my heart the next day did not show up immediately on an electrocardiogram reading. I was not instantly cured. In fact, my physical heart was still defective, inflamed, and ailing. However, complete physical healing beyond anyone's expectations was to follow, and the inner heart was healed of a wound that would have been far more devastating. The miracle, for me, began that night. For now instead of the despair of meaninglessness, I was given God's healing gift of renewed faith and hope.

Turning Point

KATHLEEN BROPHY

Divine grace and human decision intermingle mysteriously in this true story about the anguish of addiction and the miracle of recovery.

It was a warm August day. I was on a bus travelling from Mexico City to Guanajuato. It was not a first class express bus, but a rickety people-crowded, baby-crying bus that stopped often, letting people and supplies off and on. There were crates of chicks and feed supplies strapped to the top of the bus. I was travelling with a young man I had met on the plane from Los Angeles. That morning in Mexico City I had awakened in my hotel room. I was dizzy with loneliness and angry that I was making this trip. In my deepest center I did not want to be in Mexico. I did not know where I wanted to be. I did not want to pick up a strange man on the airplane just because I was too afraid to be alone. Beneath the fear there lay an overwhelming urgency to make myself important in the eyes of my family, my students and my friends. Somehow that translated into having an adventure that was unique. So I concocted a plan to go off to Mexico and pretend that I was a reporter for a national magazine, visit an Art Institute, interview Americans living in Mexico, and take the pulse of the country, the culture and the customs. The details of the arrangements and many of my movements and moments are unclear, because during this time in my life I could not go through a day without alcohol and sedatives. I was a prisoner to alcohol. I was also enslaved in a need to belong, to be important, to make a mark, to be accepted and loved. So, what I recall most clearly about this trip is the absolute confusion of feeling, the desperation of need and the terror of being found out. "Found out"— that my life was a lie, "found out" — that I was simply a frightened, hopeless and despairing child-woman with no other mission in life but to drink herself into early senility and death.

Out of this loneliness and fear, I unraveled my story to the young man, the story of why I was going to Mexico City. I impressed upon him how crucial this trip was; I also explained at great length how

A professor of English and Theatre Arts for over two decades, Kate Brophy is the author of a television play and a book on healing from grief.

much my boss at the national magazine was counting on my story. Inside my head, every word I spoke was the truth, though I knew somewhere far away, it was all a lie. I no longer knew the truth. The truth was not in me. My days were movie days. All my energy went into creating moments of complete fantasy out of the real moments of a day.

It was natural, then, to be on this old bus to Guanajuato; to be dying for a drink, to be hating every moment of this silly escapade, and to be caught up in a nightmare of self importance and self annihilation over which I was powerless. I felt damned on that journey. I was on my way to hell, for I had not had a drink in 12 hours. I was beginning to shake, and my heart was pounding in my head, a head that was on the verge of exploding. I was battle-fatigued and obsessed with one thought: destination, tequila and bed.

After 13 or 14 hours on that bus, I was driven to the Institute in San Miguel. It was after 10:00 at night, a night that seemed to be without star or moon, an unfriendly night, and I frantic for a drink. I walked into the Institute Hotel, found the night clerk, gave my name, and without waiting for any information about my reservation, I asked for the cantina. To my despair, the cantina was closed. In one brief moment of fury, I reached over the desk and grabbed the young man by his crisp white shirt front and hissed in his face, "Get me a drink, now." At that moment I had a vision of clarity. I knew that I would do anything to get that drink, sell my soul to the devil, or my body, whatever it took. I would do it. Please bring me my personal salvation in a bottle.

It is terrible to be lost.

It is terrible to be lost in self, to live in the false freedom of doing only what pleases the me that is "yes," the me that is "no." "That which I would not do is what I do." One 'me' splintered with obsessions, and alcohol and hatreds, unresolved fears and fierce jealousies; the other 'me' longing to sing and dance with the beauty of this earth, and listen to the mighty beat of the cosmic heart.

In brief moments past, God had been a reality for me. When I was a little girl, ill for many years, and confined to bed, a picture of Christ hung on a nearby wall. That picture symbolized to me all the hope, comfort and friendship in my restricted world. Receiving communion

Tom Dunham

for the first time, there was Presence, the 'Bread of Life' that saves us from hunger and fills us full of strength.

I had experienced moments of God in a barren room inside a shabby home in the barrio, a family playing guitars, singing and laughing and joyful in spite of deprivation and darkness inside and out. They were praising God and loving each other without full stomachs, good jobs and a rightful place. I had every world-weary possession, yet had nothing but this shivering frightened self to which I could pay homage.

That night in San Miguel, I reached a turning point. I knew that I could not stop drinking, and I could not stop the obsessive downward slide of destructive thinking and violent reactions to my past, present and future. At some point in the loneliness of the hotel room, sitting on the edge of the bed staring at a crystal-like gin bottle, and feeling that blessed false relief because I could drink myself to sleep, at some quiet moment during that night, I began to pray. I cannot recall the words, but I know that I touched a space within an eternal black hole, and a cry for help was heard. I had wept for my lost childhood, my lost God for years. Many a night I had wrapped the self pity tight about myself and wailed to God until I passed out from drink and despair. This moment was somehow different and the same as all the others. I truly began a journey out of a self-willed ignorance and denial. I knew that night that my trouble was beyond human aid. A cry, unheard by human ear, lifted out of my soul and shattered that black hole and released a frail beam of light, a beam of hope.

I was a blind Bartimaeus,* howling by the side of the road, cloaked in dismissal and guilt, waiting for someone; "please save me."

At last I heard the words — Do we all hear the words? Does God speak those same words to all of us who stumble along the edge of each day's ruin? — "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus said. How gentle, and kind, and silent like a slight stirring breeze. And did I answer? Yes. "May I see?"

And I threw off the tattered old cloak that held me fast, and walked toward Jerusalem, unknowing, timid, angry and defiled. In the giving up, in the surrender, there is tender hope, a tentative "yes" that is a slim reed of creative love. Some of us must be whipped and wrung out of our own ideas. We must be emptied, and then wait, wait to be filled. We are like the seed that rests in the dark earth, waiting for the

*Mark 10.46-52

first hope of the green shoot that breaks the hard crust of the pip and then drives through the earth and greets the sun. On my pilgrimage, I had to let go the lies and the madness, and begin to die to the self-will. I followed the path of the psalmist who sings:

I thank You and praise You, Lord, for saving me from disaster.
I cried out, "help me, dear God:
I'm frightened and have lost my way."
You came to me in the darkness;
You breathed life into my bones.
You plucked me from the abyss;
You healed me and made me whole.
From Psalm 30
Translated by Stephen Mitchell

NASIRA ALMA

In honor of James W. Washington, Jr.,
and his sculpture

a chisel unlocks
flight in bones of stone
an eagle exits
through the crack
of dawn

enraptured
by his commission
a sculptor hammers
to resurrect God
from the granite tomb

Josef Scaylea

James W. Washington, Jr.

Photograph from the collection of Anne Gould Hauberg.

Nasira Alma is a poet residing in Oregon. She is very ill and would appreciate your prayers.

I Will Pray for You

LINDA BANCHEK

One simple way to help one another is through "the ministry of prayer."

After Mass a tidy, gray haired woman seemed to fall out of the pew at me as I walked down the aisle. She was light as a bird buffeted by the wind, and about as easy to catch and hold steady.

"Oh, sorry," she said, "I lose my balance easily."

At the door she stopped to whisper a few words to Father, his white vestments flapping in the summer morning breeze.

I heard some fragments about "John. . .in hospital. . .not doing well. . ."

"I'll come today."

"Yes, please come," she piped.

And out she flew past the heavy doors and down the steps with me striding along beside to guide her course, if I could.

"I'm okay, now," she glanced sideways at me and then stopped. "It's my husband. He's been in the hospital for a week. He's 85. His lungs are bad from smoking."

She wavered briefly then went on, "I have to be the strength for us both and I don't know if I have it."

As I started to walk away, I surprised myself by saying that simple refrain, "I'll pray for you today." It came automatically.

A smile opened the tiny face framed by a silvery gray fringe and filled her eyes with unexpected hope.

"Oh, thank you. Thank you."

The outpouring of her gratitude confused me at first. I'd intended praying for her the moment I'd caught her, but I wasn't going to mention it. It sounds a little hokey to me, or artificial, to go around saying "I'll pray for you," especially to strangers. I'd always felt that the power of prayer — simple, silent prayer — would be enough. And, of course, it is enough for God to hear our petitions. But I see now that to say to another, "I'll pray for you," or "you are in my prayers," gives

A poet and author of children's books and cookbooks, Linda Banchek is currently writing a book on contemporary holiness and 20th century saints.

Paul Walsh

Chimayo, New Mexico

that person confidence and a feeling of comfort. Perhaps just knowing that you and your concerns are part of someone else's prayers brings a feeling of satisfaction. And the satisfaction of knowing is in the telling . . . telling the Christ in another that the Christ in you cares.

Giving out good things is part of the ministry of prayer. Unlike some of the more showy community jobs — music, parish council, or lectoring — each one of us is called to this ministry. It's easy. It can be done anywhere. It doesn't take much time, if we can remember to do it. The simple daily offering of all the benefits of our prayers, activities, and good deeds, our thoughts, all our happiness and disappointments of the day might add up to a little something. But if we join it to the great offering Jesus made with all of his prayers, works, joys, and sufferings, we have a lot to work with. It's like having access to a big bank account that won't get overdrawn. Why not just intentionally give some of it to someone every day?

There is certainly no lack of reasons to give. We seem to be bombarded with people's needs. The other day Sister Mary Ann, a Cistercian nun, and I were talking about our "busyness" and sort of com-

plaining about how much "good work" we have to do. We were speaking in lists to each other. Finally she said, "Oh, and I have so many people to pray for, especially my family."

"Well, it is your profession," I mentioned.

"Yes, that's true. But by the time I get through my main list and their needs I don't have any more time. Sometimes I can only call their names to mind. God knows what they need. I pray for you, too," she quickly reassured me, ". . .or I would, but you're on my other list."

"The non-emergency one?"

"Exactly! Now I know just where it is. When I get to the end of my prayers and there's no more time, I picture that list in my mind and ask God to remember everyone on it."

I used to imagine having a job as the administrator of a wealthy person's charitable contributions. In my imaginary position I'd give from this person's bounty to those I deemed in greatest need. Like all fantasies this one weakened under the strong light of reality. Because even in the best circumstances I could dream up I was only giving cash — a useful, but undeniably temporary aid, at best. And no matter how rich the benefactor, I had only limited amounts to dispense. And even in my best-dream scenario money would not satisfy all needs.

With time I am discovering that my dream is reality. I am the administrator (from the latin: to give, to serve as manager, to impart or disperse), of a vast treasury belonging to a very wealthy Person, indeed. All the gifts of the spirit of God are mine to dole out because my beloved brother, Jesus, the Lord of the universe, lets me delve into this storehouse where true prosperity is contained, and spend all these gifts at will.

To enter this place containing everything that money can't buy (but what everyone longs for), we only need a little bit of the first gift, faith — the "prime mover" of all good things. The treasury overflows in abundance. Peace, and joy, comfort, strength, and love (most of all love), real security, and sincere compassion are there ready for dispersal. We merely have to withdraw these invaluables by prayer and bestow them on others with a simple intention or by saying the formula, "I will pray for you."

I once knew an older woman on a limited income who took in ironing, mostly busy executives' shirts. The price was reasonable. The quality of the work satisfactory, but nothing special. Just how spectacularly can you iron a shirt, after all? But the compliments poured in and she

always had more work than she could handle. In fact, I think there was a waiting list. Wives reported that their husbands raved about Anne's ironing. Once I remarked on her popularity. With eyes twinkling mischievously as a six-year-old's she told me her "secret."

"First, as I dampen all the shirts I think about the man who will wear them. I picture the good things that will happen to him in this shirt. Then, while I'm ironing, I pray."

"Do you mean you pray for him?" I ask.

"Not necessarily," she hesitated, considering, "I just pray. But I offer all the benefit of my prayers and the work of ironing for the owner of the shirt. He's in my attention. He's in my prayers."

Anne's not available for ironing any more. She went to work as the live-in nanny for her grandchildren. No doubt she's continuing her administrative work of praying. Through her I came to see that while giving something tangible or material to others we can have the intention of sharing some of our true wealth at the same time. Since we've got it, let's spend it.

Rock Ritual XXII: Eagle Watch

ROBERT O'ROURKE

With Rock Ritual 22, Bob O'Rourke is concluding the series which he has been writing for Fellowship in Prayer since 1991. He adresses the following message to his readers:

> In Rock Rituals, I have returned my love and respect for the elemental gifts of earth — the animals, plants, insects, landscapes, where I live — hoping that in simple ceremony my readers might feel a Presence, too. Now it is time for me to venture beyond to the next horizon. In time, I may meet you all again on these pages with new discoveries. Until then, *Mitakuye Oyasin* — we are all related.

Here is Bob's final, farewell Rock Ritual:

On this upland prairie
it is the season of
hawks and eagles flying.

I return to my solitary rock
to sit quietly
listening —
watching —
waiting —
becoming one with the prairie grasses,
one with this solid rock,
and suddenly, as if taking wings,
kin to an eagle!

This one circles high
on warm, morning thermals
her feathers tapered
in swift-sweeping glides
gracing a cloud
soaring — soaring —

Watching this high flyer
I remember a Hopi belief:
"It is the eagle
who is mediator

between earth and sky —
The messenger who carries
winged prayers skyward
beyond the clouds
to sacred places."

Today I shall ask
this *Kwahu**
sifting sunshine through wing tips
to relay my musings
my morning prayer
heavenward.
"*Haliskai!*"

Lisa Smith

* Kwahu is a Hopi word for "eagle"
** Haliskai, also Hopi, means "This is how it is."

Robert O'Rourke is a Colorado writer, poet and folk artist, who sculpts santos, *statues of saints revered in the Southwest. The illustration accompanying Bob's article is by Lisa Smith, also a Colorado artist.*

Our heartfelt gratitude to Bob and Lisa for their artistic contributions to Fellowship in Prayer. We will miss them.

A Brief Christmas Encounter

DOROTHY MARTIN

The effort to connect with a suffering human being brings great rewards.

Each year at Christmastime, something unexpected happens which brings me special joy. Often it's a phone call or a letter from someone I haven't heard from in a long time. Four years ago the person was someone I didn't know and though our meeting was brief, it has permanently affected my life.

One of our family traditions was to take my elderly mother to the late Christmas eve service at a large downtown church instead of going to the local small church where we are members. She was fond of the beautiful old building with its carefully polished rosewood interior and furnishings. She enjoyed the full rich sounds of the pipe organ, the beautiful music of the large well-trained choir and the inspiring readings and reflections of the ministers. As we traditionally sang the closing hymn, "Silent Night," the darkness broken only by flickering candlelight people's voices reflected their deep feelings of this special night. After the lights came on again, there was always a quiet pause before people began to gather up their coats to go back out into the wintry night.

Then people would begin chatting with family members and exchanging greetings with friends as they slowly moved up the aisle.

On this night, as my husband, my mother and I walked up the aisle, I noticed a man standing alone in a back pew, waiting for the crowd in the aisle to move out. He didn't fit the image portrayed by others around him. Unlike the other men in their well-tailored suits and festive brocade holiday vests, he was attired in well-worn jeans and an all-weather jacket. Unlike most of the people who'd come that night from their lovely homes in the suburbs and the more affluent parts of town,

A teacher, retreat director, and workshop leader, Dorothy Martin makes audiotapes for people undergoing challenges to their health. Her approach to healing integrates body, mind, and spirit.

We invite you to send the story of your own transforming experience to the editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ, 08542. You do not need to be a professional writer.

Cliff Moore

this man, I thought, at best might live in some low cost hotel in the nearby poorer section of downtown. As I paused to let him come out into the aisle ahead of me, I wasn't surprised to catch a slight whiff of stale liquor on his breath.

I was reminded of the words of a friend of mine who's work at that church included ministry to some of the street people in the area. She had told me that one of the difficult things for these people to deal with is feeling dehumanized when they see us go out of our way to avoid them or to avoid looking at them. As I saw that man standing back, standing alone, I wanted to recognize his presence in that congregation celebrating the birth of Jesus the Christ. "Merry Christmas," didn't seem appropriate as I thought of him, possibly without family or friends, possibly without food or a home.

He turned around in response to my touch on his shoulder. I said simply, "May the Peace of Christ be with you." He thanked me as we walked through the door into the narthex.

We were soon separated in the crowd and my attention turned to helping my mother down the stairs leading to the exit. At the bottom of the stairs we stepped aside to wait for my husband to bring the car to pick us up. I glanced back up and saw the man standing by the wall

at the top of the stairs. I had a fleeting thought that he might be waiting for the crowd to disperse so that he could ask the minister for a handout or some food.

A few moments later, I felt a touch on my arm and there he was beside me. As our eyes met, he said, "I just want to tell you that's the nicest thing anyone has said to me in ten years. Thank you." He told me his name was Robert and he asked my name. We stood together for a few moments in comfortable silence, neither of us feeling the need to say more, as if each of us was savoring the gift we'd just received.

Then he started toward the door and said something about "just going down the street aways." I responded with, "God bless you, Robert." And he was gone.

Gone, but not gone. He'll always be with me. Often my prayers include Robert, that he may feel God's blessing. There's new meaning for me in "Passing the Peace of Christ." Each Sunday at church when it's time to "pass the peace," I cannot just utter "The Peace of Christ," as many people do. I am compelled to look each person in the eye and with all sincerity say, "May the peace of Christ be with you." And I think of Robert.

Linda Lamb

> One of the difficult things for [street people] to deal with is feeling dehumanized when they see us go out of our way to avoid them or to avoid looking at them.

Since meeting Robert, I have a deeper level of empathy for people often labeled "down and out." As I've often wondered about the stories Robert might tell about his life, I sometimes wonder about the stories of others who appear down on their luck.

I have other nice memories of that Christmas four years ago, but most precious is the memory of those few moments with Robert when together, we truly celebrated the wondrous gift of God's love. I'm not sure which of us was touched more deeply and it really doesn't matter.

THE GIFT OF PRAYER: A TREASURY OF PERSONAL PRAYER FROM THE WORLD'S SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS,
edited by Jared T. Kieling, A Fellowship in Prayer Book, Continuum, New York, 1995, 252 pages, hardback, $19.95.

Few things in life are genuinely treasures. Many candidates are offered for this claim on our heart's deepest attention. Only treasures of the Spirit, so precious and timeless, inspire and reflect our profoundest longing for the Divine. Such a treasure is *The Gift of Prayer.* It has so many uses for differing occasions, but its ultimate purpose is to be a tool for prayer. For me, as I traverse the various moods and experiences, hopes and needs expressed in its rich pages, I am continually brought back to the intuition that this jewel of a book is meant, by the Spirit, for *lectio* divina, that is, as a resource for spiritual reading in order to awaken and inspire more subtle levels of intimacy with the Divine. The eloquent depth and simplicity of this volume is glimpsed, for instance, in a prayer by Abraham Heschel: "Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy."

Prayer is the human heart reaching out to the Divine, to Ultimate Mystery, in faith, in hope, in love. Or in complete vulnerability, skepticism, and frustration, perhaps like the apostle who uttered: "Help my unbelief, O Lord." We all pray, but we don't necessarily always have the words to express what is trying to come forth from our innermost depths.

This new prayer book by Fellowship in Prayer is a wonderful aid to doing precisely that: expressing what is in the depths of our being, no matter the occasion, or the particular challenge, suffering, joy, expectation, decision, transition, journey, or venture. Arranged under themes, we find prayers that give form to adoration and praise, seeking the Divine, silence, intimacy with God, prayers for loved ones, peace and unity, protection, gratitude, earthly and heavenly life, and spiritual peace.

The Gift of Prayer is made all the more valuable because it contains a subject and author index. The reader will find it a rich experience, and the person of prayer will treasure it as a living tool to inspire the inner life. *Brother Wayne Teasdale*

FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER, INC.

291 Witherspoon Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3227
office - (609) 924-6863
fax - (609) 924-6910

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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PRODUCTION MANAGER
Linda D. Baumann

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We welcome articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience, religious faith or practices, and similar topics. Preference is given to experiential manuscripts. Manuscripts should not exceed 1500 words, should be typed, double spaced, on 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 11 inch paper, on a 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ inch floppy minidisk, 2S/2D, or 2S/HD, or on 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ HD microdisks, in WordPerfect and sent to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542-3227. Please include a brief biography.

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